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Waisová, Šárka

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Between Atlanticism, Anti-Americanism and Europeanization: Dilemmas in Czech Foreign Policy and the War on Terrorism

Šárka Waisová[1]

Abstract: *US–Czech relations have a long tradition, dating back to the time of an independent Czechoslovakia. The author analyse US–Czech bilateral relations in the post-Cold War period. The primary focus will be on long-term trends, along with the influence that particular events have had on the evolution and periodization of these relations. Some of the consequences of 9/11 and the War on Terrorism for US–Czech relations will be examined.*

Key words: ***Czech Republic, the war on terrorism, US-Czech relations***

US–Czech relations have a long tradition, dating back to the time of an independent Czechoslovakia (1918). The foundations of US–Czech relations were established against the backdrop of the outcome of First World War. Analytically, their evolution can be divided into four distinct periods. First, from 1918, the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia, until 1948, the final victory of the Communists and the beginning of a strong orientation towards the USSR. Second, the 1948–89 period, marking the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc. Third, the period from 1989 until the autumn of 2001, which includes the establishment of an independent Czech Republic as a result of the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Fourth, the period after 11 September 2001.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse US–Czech bilateral relations in the post-Cold War period. The primary focus will be on long-term trends, along with the influence that particular events have had on the evolution and periodization of these relations. Some of the consequences of 9/11 and the War on Terrorism for US–Czech relations will be examined. An emphasis on the long-term evolution of US–Czech affairs gives way to the development of the argument that the 11 September attacks served as an intervening factor in Czech domestic politics which deepened the existing divergence among political élites, as well as the distance between élites and the general public. I maintain that the development of US–Czech relations in the post-9/11 period does not constitute a new stage *per se*, but rather signifies a continuation of the process of "deterioration" which started long before 11 September, during the second half of

[1] This text is a preliminary version of the text published in Miller, Mark J. – Stefanova, Boyka (eds.) (2006): *The war on terror in comparative perspecitve. US security and Foreign Policy after 9/11*. Palgrave.

the 1990s. It reflects the dilemma in Czech foreign policy towards the US and the cleavage between Atlanticism and Europeanization in Czech politics.

It should be noted that Czech academic writing on US–Czech relations remains limited. Most of the current literature deals with the interwar period, while other publications examine Czechoslovakia and its relations to the West during the Cold War. The post-Cold War period of Washington–Prague relations lacks a comprehensive analysis from the perspective of their long-term evolution. The purpose of this chapter is thus not only to address specific features of the Czech responses to 9/11 and the War on Terror but also to contribute to the broader understanding of US–Czech relations.

The legacy of the Cold War in US–Czech relations

After Second World War, the ideological differences between the US and the USSR led to the outbreak of the Cold War. The final division of the European continent was concluded by the end of the 1940s following a whole series of events: the Marshall Plan; the Berlin crisis; the establishment of the West German and East German states, etc. After a short intermezzo between May 1945 and February 1948, when the Czechoslovak political élites oscillated between the East and the West, Czechoslovakia became an integral part of the Communist Bloc. After the establishment of the Warsaw Pact in 1955, directed against the Western powers and internal anti-Communist threats, there was an intensification of the Soviet imposition of its security concept, military doctrine, and foreign policy goals.

The evolution of US–Czech relations was thus strongly influenced by the Cold War and more or less paralleled the evolution of US–Soviet relations. Despite the correlation, there were significant differences in the relations between individual members of the Eastern bloc and the US as well as other Western countries. During the Cold War period, the US prioritized its relationship with Poland among the East European countries. While several US presidents visited Communist Poland (Nixon, Ford, and Carter), no US president visited Czechoslovakia.

Three important factors influenced US–Czech relations before 1989. Firstly, the Czechoslovak lobby in the US was small and weak. There were no emigrants of the statute and profile of Polish émigré Zbigniew Brzezinski among the Czechs in the US, the Czech diaspora in the US suffered from a great degree of fragmentation. Secondly, the geopolitical role of Czechoslovakia during the Cold War was marginal. Thirdly, the US, despite its status as a symbol of freedom and democracy for the Czechs, conceded to the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and thus accepted the Brezhnev Doctrine. American consent to the "limited sovereignty" of the socialist countries resulted in a deep frustration within the Czechoslovak population, which relied on the US to reject Moscow's intervention. The consequences of this frustration could be viewed in the conduct of Czech political élites and public opinion throughout the 1990s, and particularly following the Kosovo intervention of 1999.

The Velvet Revolution: a new challenge and opportunity for Czech foreign policy

The decline of bipolar confrontation and the disintegration of Soviet power constituted decisive moments for all Central European countries. Their newly restored independence cleared the way for a new era of foreign and domestic policy. Under these new conditions, former Communist countries redefined their interests, goals, and policies, as well as their allies and partners. The essential policy goals of the Central European countries were to acquire a stable, free security environment and achieve the prerequisites for democratic development.

Four alternative scenarios for the future security architecture in Central Europe emerged at the beginning of the 1990s (Waisová, 2003):

First, maintenance of the status quo, that is, continuing the presence of the Soviet Army in Central Europe and maintenance of NATO and the Warsaw Pact adjusted to the new political and security conditions. Second, isolationist neutrality. Third, dissolution of NATO and of the Warsaw Pact and institutionalization of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (currently the OSCE). Fourth, enlargement of the transatlantic institutional security structures to include the East European countries and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.

The status quo alternative was questioned by many former Soviet satellites and directly rejected by Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Šedivý, 2001: 17). The isolationist neutrality alternative and the possibility of institutionalization of the CSCE were opposed by former Soviet satellites as well as by the NATO countries. Following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the official dissolution of the Soviet Union – the Central European states eventually abandoned the status quo alternative and that of neutrality, and were inclined to accept the fourth alternative.

The summit of the Central European presidents in Visegrád in February 1991 *de facto* confirmed this decision by the signature of the Declaration on cooperation between Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary on the way to European integration. One of the goals of the Declaration was for the Visegrád countries to become part of the European political, security, and economic system. The Kraków summit of the Central European presidents of October 1991 officially declared the interest of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary to join both the European Union (EU) and NATO.

The security situation in Europe deteriorated during the early 1990s as a result of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. The inability of both the EU and the CSCE/OSCE to resolve the entire range of new conflicts and crises became obvious. In response to this situation Czechoslovakia opted for NATO's collective defence system. The unification of Germany, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and, last but not least, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia strengthened the Atlantic orientation of Czech politics to such an extent that a pro-US and Atlanticist orientation ultimately prevailed

among the Czech political élite. The Americanization of Czech foreign policy deepened during the Clinton Administration when Madeleine Albright, an American citizen of Czech origin, became the US Secretary of State. The Clinton Administration promoted friendly and cooperative contacts with the Czechs, based on positive personal relations between Madeleine Albright and former Czech President Václav Havel. In 1997 the French Foreign Ministry even went so far as to label the Czechs as members of "the American camp." Prague was said to be "more interested in the US protection than in France's vision of the Union as the European pillar of NATO."[2]

Europeanization, Czech foreign and domestic policy, and the causes of anti-Americanism

Two strands in Czech foreign policy – one pro-Atlanticist, one pro-European – emerged following negotiations on EU and NATO enlargement during the late 1990s. Atlanticism was strong in the period shortly before and after the NATO enlargement. The Kosovo intervention, however, was followed by an increase in anti-American sentiments among the Czech public identified as a negative stance towards Atlanticism. Since the Kosovo crisis in 1999, Czech anti-Americanism, coupled with anti-Atlanticism, produced a stronger focus towards Europe as an ever more likely alternative.

This shift – or, rather, dilemma – between an Atlanticist and a European choice has been significant for Czech foreign policy in the post-Cold War period and has remained a problem of great gravity ever since.

The European orientation of Czech foreign policy was strengthened by the process of Europeanization, which led to the Czech accession to EU membership on 1 May 2004. On the one hand, Europeanization is invoked to describe the development of EU-level institutions and their growing policy competence, and therefore the emergence of an authoritative system of European governance. On the other hand, Europeanization is also understood as a process by which domestic actors and institutions adapt to the institutional framework and logic of the EU (Poguntke et al., 2003: 2). In the Czech political environment, Europeanization is understood as a process of acceptance of European formal and informal rules, policy paradigms, styles, beliefs and "ways of doing things." For the Czechs, Europe constitutes a symbol of democracy, human rights, and norm-guided multi-lateralism.

In the early 1990s the Czechs had a profound respect for US foreign policy. The transition of US engagement in world politics towards a global leadership during the second half of the 1990s, accompanied by the erosion of multi-lateralism, led to an increasing wave of anti-Americanism both worldwide and in Central Europe. Czech

[2] See Joel Blocker, "Chirac Fails to Improve Franco-Czech Relations," RFE/RL Newsline April 4, 1997, www.rferl.org/newsline/1997/04/5-not/not040497.html (accessed 12 April 2003).

public opinion was highly critical of US ambivalence towards multilateral engagement, especially of its reluctance to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the International Criminal Court.

For the Czechs, being a European meant full acceptance of democracy, human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and support for international humanitarian law. The European orientation became the antithesis of the unilateralism of US foreign policy. Czech public opinion regarded pre-emptive action as a sign of aggressive, non-democratic and hegemonic policy on behalf of the US. Hence, the rejection of pre-emptive action stemmed from respect for international law and democratic values, which the Czech public saw in the European Union.

NATO enlargement as an important facet of US–Czech relations

In the early 1990s, not only the Czech Republic but also Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic states were interested in joining the NATO collective defence system. The strong preference of the Central European countries for NATO membership, the new global security environment, the transformation of NATO's strategy, and the increasing structural weight of the US in the international system profoundly affected Czech–US bilateral relations.

The special role of the US became obvious in the eastward enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance. Historical context and tradition prompted the Czech Republic to adopt a strong orientation towards the US in the early 1990s. The Czechs perceived American influence and presence in Europe as an instrument of control over German and Russian power as well as an insurance in the case of weakness or indecision on the part of France and Great Britain.[3]

The EU and NATO strategy of enlargement to the east had a significant impact upon the new European security architecture. The traditional transatlantic area was expanding and becoming more inclusive. It changed the perceptions of threats and security priorities of the former Eastern Bloc countries. Since the new member states considered the US to be the main driving force behind NATO's enlargement and a guarantor of European security, enlargement reinforced US hegemony within the Alliance. Poland was the key new actor in European security to have supported the US after enlargement was completed, by maintaining a close special relationship with it. American initiative during the enlargement process also helped foster the pro-American stance in Czech politics. Prior to NATO's enlargement and for a short period afterwards, Czech public opinion was very optimistic about the benefits of a NATO membership and a partnership with the US.

[3] The sources of these perceptions can be traced back to earlier European policies of appeasement, the Munich Conference, and the Prague Spring.

The Kosovo intervention – further deterioration of US-Czech relations

Post-Cold War Europe did not become the zone of stability and peace as expected. Increasingly, the need emerged to reshape and transform the relationships among members of the transatlantic community so as to build a functioning security system in Europe. From the mid-1990s on, Washington had been losing interest in participating in the European security architecture and had tried to pass more responsibility to its European allies. A significant discrepancy persisted between the relationships of the Central European states with the US on the one hand, and those with Western Europe on the other, concerning security, political, and economic issues typical of the early 1990s. The Central European countries were economically highly interdependent on Western Europe, but on security issues they trusted in and relied on the US.

After the outbreak of conflicts in the Balkans and the partial withdrawal of American soldiers from Europe in the second half of the 1990s, Central Europe became NATO's strategic partner in Europe. The eastern borders of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary became the eastern borders of the Alliance. The territory of the new member states constituted a natural bridge to the Baltic area, the Balkans, and the Black Sea area. Due to Austria's neutrality, which prevented it from authorizing the transit of military and strategic material over its territory, Hungary became the strategic point of transit and over-flight operations during the Gulf War and the conflicts in the Western Balkans.

As NATO members, the Central European states started to fulfil tasks and commitments related to the implementation of democratic principles, democratic control and modernization of the armed forces, and strengthening of economic and political stability. The transatlantic community, particularly the US, referred to NATO as a "community of common values," which implied that NATO members shared values which distinguished the Alliance from the rest of the world. After joining NATO in 1999, the Czech population finally experienced the feeling of being back in Europe, that is – being part of the democratic and free world again.

But this victorious feeling was rapidly replaced by disappointment. Immediately after accession, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary had to cope with NATO's decisions on the issue of (non-)intervention in Kosovo. As the Czech people traditionally regarded the Alliance as an opposition to Russian power and as a symbol of democracy and respect for human rights, its decision to intervene in Kosovo without a UN Security Council resolution caused considerable consternation among the Czech public.

Two other factors were at the origin of the negative response to NATO's intervention. Firstly, the Czech government was unable (or unwilling) to declare openly how the Czech representatives at the North Atlantic Council had voted. Secondly, the Czechs had traditionally had good relations with the former Yugoslavia and, therefore, had mixed feelings about the real motives behind the intervention. The potentially

all-too-close resemblance between the Kosovo intervention and Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 was what most preoccupied the Czech people. Furthermore, Czech public opinion interpreted the Kosovo intervention as evidence of US unilateralism and the neglect of the UN system of rules and norms.[4] The intervention resulted in pessimism about the impartiality of NATO's action, which precipitated a strong wave of anti-Americanism.

The Kosovo case and all subsequent attempts to resolve the conflicts in the Western Balkans exposed the reality of excessive American influence within the NATO Alliance, as well as the limitations of American security guarantees in Europe. The negative assessment of the Kosovo intervention in a number of countries, the gradual withdrawal of US forces from Europe, the emphasis upon European responsibility within NATO, accompanied by the EU's attempt to develop its own security and foreign policy, caused a rift in the transatlantic relationship. Political debate in the Czech Republic in the wake of the Kosovo intervention prompted a dilemma and doubts about the value of Atlanticism. Public trust in the Alliance and the US diminished.[5] The Czech government was affected by the status quo of the transatlantic dialogue. The decline in public trust of the US was enough to begin a search for alternatives to NATO in international politics. The desired alternative appeared to be the EU and its Common Foreign and Security Policy.

What did 11 September 2001 change? Consequences of the war on terrorism for US–Czech relations

Washington and Prague entered the new millennium in a state of hostile mutual relations. The first years of the 21 century were characterized by events which markedly influenced the evolution of bilateral relations. The chain of events was initiated by the terrorist attacks on American targets on 11September 2001. The US global War on Terrorism, which included the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, brought about a major redefinition of America's strategic interests, the foreign and national security policy instruments, and the configuration of possible allies. The European NATO member states were divided in their reaction to the US led war on terrorism. The US went in search for new allies for its anti-terrorist coalition.

Immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, the Czech Republic expressed its solidarity with the American people and support for the American response to the attacks. Prague was among Washington's anti-terrorist allies. However, the situation took a sudden turn when the US began to look for new

[4] See commentary by Victor Gomez in "Foreign-policy Confusion in the Czech Republic," RFE/RL Newsline May 28, 1999, http://www.rferl.org/newsline/1999/05/5-not/not-280599.html (accessed April 12, 2003).

[5] See poll data on public approval of foreign countries in Mladá Fronta Dnes, 9 August 2004: A2. Opinion polls showed that 64 percent of the Czech population trusted Slovakia, 59.6 percent France, 54 percent Great Britain, 53 percent Italy, 39.9 percent the US, and 21.3 percent Russia.

partners and allies outside Europe, and Russia emerged as a key partner in the global War on Terror. The reality of the US coming together with non-European regions and partners, especially with Russia, elicited insecurity among the Czech political élite and the population in general. This anxiety, or even fear, was largely due to Donald Rumsfeld's widely cited statement that the "coalition does not determine the mission, but the mission determines the coalition." Czech citizens asked themselves whether their partnership with the US within the NATO Alliance was one of principle, or whether the US priorities had changed and a new policy of cooperation with Russia was emerging.

This insecurity is "new" in terms of its sources. It is not an insecurity about the Czech Republic's own security; it is rather an insecurity about its role and position in world politics. The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999 but the NATO of 2006 is a quite different Alliance than the one it initially joined. Washington puts NATO members under pressure to act "out of area" and extend the regional responsibility of the Alliance. Czech insecurity stems from the open-ended nature of US demands. Do the Czechs genuinely have interests in Northern Africa or Afghanistan? Are the Czechs able to send troops to non-European areas? Are the Czechs able to be a US partner or is the technological and interest gap deep enough to impede any possibility of equal partnership? And the nagging question resulting from the Kosovo intervention and Belgrade bombing is: what kind of division of labour will emerge in NATO in view of the technological gap between the US and the new member states?

Afghanistan and beyond

When the Afghanistan intervention started, US–Czech relations had for a time been cool. Nevertheless, the deterioration in the relations between Prague and Washington continued, for several reasons. First, differences and discrepancies between Prague and Washington arose over the rationale of the intervention in Afghanistan and its subsequent management. Second, a clash of conflicting opinions regarding the issue became apparent in Czech domestic politics.

As witnessed during the Kosovo intervention, deep cleavages reappeared with regard to the Afghan, and later the Iraqi, intervention among Czech political élites, as well as between élites and mass public opinion. The Iraqi intervention and the negative results of the search for weapons of mass destruction escalated the frustration of the Czech citizens and decreased public trust in the US. Against the backdrop of the cleavages, three camps, or policy positions, gradually crystallized: an anti-American position, a pro-American position and an intermediate position. The anti-American camp brought together the Communists and the Civic Democratic Party, led by Václav Klaus who replaced Václav Havel as Czech President in February 2003. Klaus criticized the American intervention and denied Washington any Czech support. The former Czech President Václav Havel became the leading representative of the pro-American

camp. A staunch supporter of American activities in Afghanistan and Iraq, he even signed an open letter in support of the War on Terror together with representatives of Great Britain, Spain and other countries from the "new" Europe. Havel's pro-US position owed a great deal to his antipathy towards Václav Klaus.

The Czech government, a coalition of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, occupied an intermediate position. It supported the US in Afghanistan and Iraq by means of military material, field hospitals, and permission to fly through Czech airspace, but at the same time rejected Havel's open letter.

In fact, the Czech government supported the French and German position and asked Washington to be withdrawn from the list of the antiterrorist coalition countries. A Czech field hospital was officially sent to Iraq and deployed at Camp Doha, and another one to Afghanistan. The Czech Republic contributed to ISAF for humanitarian reasons and not as a member to the anti-terrorist coalition. The often-heated debates among policy makers enhanced public uncertainty about the Czech Republic's foreign policy goals.

The issues of Afghanistan and Iraq were used by Czech political parties as an instrument of pressure in the presidential election of February 2003. All parties, especially the Civic Democratic Party and the Social Democrats, needed a clear issue to help them attract votes. After the US intervention in Afghanistan, the Czech population became dubious about American values and power interests. Criticizing Washington became fashionable. The anti-American position and the refusal to participate in the antiterrorist coalition were merely vicarious issues, as the bottom line of the debate on the provision of the field hospital was an issue of the state budget and the reform of the Czech Army. Different positions defended by individual policymakers caused anarchy inside the Czech government. Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla remained in the "in-between" camp while the Czech Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defence joined the "pro-American camp."

The contradictory Czech positions were accordingly reflected in bilateral relations with the US. Washington redefined its relations with Prague and members of the political élite. During Havel's presidency, Czech politics was more or less regarded as coherent in the field of foreign affairs. Now Washington started to differentiate among various representatives of the Czech state. While the Bush Administration maintains contacts and negotiations with the government, especially the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defence, it more or less ignores Czech President Václav Klaus.

Finally, negotiations about the sale of Czech Věra radars to China in May 2004 raised high expectations of the warming of Prague-Washington relations. The Czech Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defence had previously authorized the sale of six radio-locators to China by the Omnipol company. The government later revoked the contract due to American disagreement. US leaders, mainly President George Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell, expressed anxiety about the possibility of the Chinese use of radio-locators, which could facilitate monitoring of American

vessels operating between China and Taiwan. Although the Czech government reached a consensus concerning the reversal of the sale, US-Czech relations remained cool.

From Atlanticism to what? The dilemma between Atlanticism and Europeanization

Czech politics has been oscillating between pro-Americanism and Atlanticism on the one side, and anti-Americanism and anti-Atlanticism on the other side for a long time. The pro-Atlanticist orientation of Czech foreign and security policy gradually weakened, accompanied by a retreat of the pro-US lobby in the Czech Republic. Since the second half of the 1990s, there have been two main strands in Czech politics – the pro-Atlanticist and the pro-European group. This dichotomy is crucial to understanding contemporary Czech politics and has greatly affected the conceptual foundations of Czech foreign and national security policy.

Different perspectives can be found within the Czech Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Ministry, as well as among the parliamentary parties. The Ministry of Defence is traditionally more oriented towards NATO while the Foreign Ministry primarily tends to take the Czech position as a EU member into consideration. Not only are the Civic Democrats the bastion of self-proclaimed Euro-scepticism in the Czech Republic but in terms of security policy, they also hold a strongly pro-US and Atlanticist stance, with the exception of Václav Klaus, who favours the Alliance but criticizes US foreign policy. Meanwhile, the Social Democrats embrace a particularly positive approach towards the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the EU (Khol, 2003: 8).

The lack of consensus about the fundamental foreign and security policy orientations of the Czech Republic is ever more important due to the policy entanglement over the state borders issue. Political consensus about foreign and security policy is impeded by numerous factors: the absence of a Czech "strategic culture," limited expertise of the actors of security policy, limited participation on behalf of civil society, political disagreements about foreign policy priorities among political parties and divergent goals of individual government departments.

Concluding remarks

During the last decade, the bilateral relationship between the Czech Republic and the US has been suffering. There are various reasons for its deterioration. Both states have common interests and concerns in world politics, but their points of departure are different. The foreign policy behaviour of the US and the Czech Republic, as is the case in general, is influenced by domestic politics. Foreign policy has become an important election issue and is considered a part of securing the economic well-being and prosperity of society. US domestic politics led to a change in Washington's

behaviour in world politics, a departure from multilateralism, and the non-ratification of international humanitarian and environmental norms. The US perceives the Czech Republic as one of many small states, whose relationship with Washington is not decisive for US global interests. Czech foreign policy has been crucially determined by changes in the US international role. It also depends on domestic political conflict and competition and the party in government. If the Civic Democrats win an election, the Atlantic and pro-American orientation would be strengthened; in case of a Social Democratic victory, the pro-European multilateralist inclination of Czech politics would gain momentum.

The prospects for Czech relations with the US may be forecast through a comparison with their bilateral relations since the 1990s. If we are to compare Washington's and Prague's participation on the development of bilateral relations, we observe that in the case of the US, foreign policy goals are more important and influential in public policy (at least after 9/11), while in the case of the Czech Republic, the relationship to the US has been maintained in a rather irrational way. Atlanticism and a pro-American stance have become synonymous, just as anti-Americanism has become interchangeable with a pro-European position. It may be argued that the negative Czech assessment of the US does not fully reflect the impact of 9/11 and the war on terror, but rather stems from the US retreat from multilateralism. Important questions remain. How will Czech EU membership shape the future relationship between the US and the Czech Republic? Will Czech politics find a consensus about the relationship to the US? And, last but not least, what will the US policy towards Central Europe be in the coming decades?

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Šárka Waisová *is Head of Department of Politics and International Relations at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. Her research and professional efforts focus on security studies and theory of international relations.*

E-mail: waisova@kap.zcu.cz